Importance of Farmers’ Markets in Southeast Kansas

Trent Kling
Makeup of Southeast Kansas

- Southeast Kansas is neither sparsely populated nor defined by a large metro area
  - Largest city: Pittsburg (just over 20,000 people)
  - Seven towns with populations over 5,000
  - Most SEK counties over 12,000 in population
- Cities and towns are not far apart, but are diverse and have distinct identities
- Identity formation occurs through several avenues
Identity formation of “small towns”

- Traditions & rituals
- School districts (including activities and athletics)
- Industry
- Businesses unique to the town
Role of Farmers’ Markets in Small Town Identity Formation

- Farmers’ markets serve as important fixtures of small town commerce
- Markets often boast producers or products unique to a particular area
- Can serve as a facilitator of new rituals and traditions
- Likewise, may be an important extension of existing rituals and traditions
Markets as Economic Driver

- A 2002 study commissioned by the Project for Public Spaces found that 60% of market shoppers visit nearby stores on the same day.
- The same study found that 36% of market shoppers only shop at nearby stores on the market days.
- A longitudinal study by Oregon State found that in towns under 50,000 in population, 33% to 65% of market customers make purchases at neighboring businesses before/after a market trip.
- The same study found that, compared to money spent at market, customers spent 31% to 92% as much at the neighboring businesses on day of market.
Markets as Employment Generator

- A 2008 Clemson study of farmers’ markets in towns of fewer than 8,000 found that markets in such towns generate both direct and indirect full-time jobs.
  - Job generation depends on success of the market; can create as many as 15-16 agricultural, retail, and administrative jobs.
- A similar study at Washington State found that markets of 11-30 create up to 6.0 market-specific full-time jobs when founded in towns under 10,000.
- Businesses in Wisconsin small- and medium-sized towns were found to increase staffing during market days and hours.
Markets as Community Rituals

- Customers of small town markets in various states consider the market an “event” as much as a shopping area.

- Respondents in Indiana study considered attendance at small town markets as a “ritual” repeated each week.

- Several communities have found that pairing a farmers’ market with an annual event (or monthly event) has increased attendance at both, creating a much larger event.
Important Takeaways

- Area businesses and governments often underestimate the impact of farmers’ markets on their small communities
  - Businesses see market as competition for customers, not as a draw
  - Governments worry about setting aside public places for a market; are concerned with upsetting potentially unhappy business owners
- Our “job” as market participants should include public relations efforts
- Vital to educate the public about the benefits of farmers’ markets in Southeast Kansas towns
- In addition to the traditionally-espoused market benefits (eating locally produced foods, healthier foods, etc.), we should underscore the ability of SEK markets to assist in town identity formation